

Legend of John Henry's Hammer

Johnny Cash

John Henry's pappy woke him up one midnight
He said, "'Fore the sheriff comes I wanna tell you - listen boy!
Said, Learn to ball a jack, learn to lay a track, learn to pick and shovel t
oo,
And take my hammer! It'll do anything you tell it to.

John Henry's mammy had about a dozen babies,
John Henry's pappy broke jail about a dozen times
The babies all got sick and when the doctor wanted money,
He said, I'll pay you quarter at a time startin' tomorrow
That's the pay for a steel driver on this line.

Then the section foreman said, Hey - hammer swinger!
I see you brought you own hammer boy, but what else can all those muscles do
And he said, I can turn a jack, I can lay a track, I can pick and shovel too
(Can you swing a hammer boy?)
Yes, Sir, I'll do anything you hire me to.

Now ain't you something! So high and mighty wif' your muscles!
Just go ahead, boy, and pick up that hammer! Pick up the hammer!

He said, Get a rusty spike and swing it down three times.
I'll pay you a nickel a day for every inch you sink it to.
Go on and do what you say you can do.

With a steep nose hammer on a four foot switch handle,
John Henry raised it back 'til it touched his heels. Then
The spike went through the cross tie, and it split it half in two.
Thirty-five cents a day for drivin' steel.
(Sweat! Sweat boy, sweat! You owe me two more swings!)
I was born for driven steel.

Well John Henry hammered in the mountain.
He'd give a grunt and he'd give a groan with every swing.
The women folks for miles around heard him and come down,
To watch him make the cold steel ring. Lord what a swinger!
Just listen to that cold steel ring!

But the bad boss come up laughin' at John Henry.
Said, You full of vinegar now, but you about through!
We gonna get a steam drill to do your share of drivin?,
Then what's all them muscles gonna do? Huh, John Henry?
Gonna take a little bit of vinegar out of you.

John Henry said, I feed four little brothers,
And baby sister's walking on her knees.
Did the lord say that machines aughtta take the place of living?
And what's a substitute for bread and beans? (I saint seen it)
Do engines get rewarded for their steam

John Henry hid in a coal mine for his dinner nap.
Had thirty minutes to rest before the bell.
The mine boss hollered, Get up, whoever you are, and get a pick axe!
Give me enough coal to start another Hell. (And keep it burnin!)
Mine me enough to start another Hell!

John Henry said to his captain, A man ain't nothin' but a man.

But if you'll bring that steam drill round, I'll beat it fair and honest.
I'll die with my hammer in my hand but I'll be laughing
'Cuz you can't replace a steel driven man.

There was a big crowd of people at the mountain,
John Henry said to the steam drill, How is you?
Pardon me mister steam drill, I suppose you didn't hear me. I said how're yo
u
Well can you turn a jack, can you lay a track, can you pick and shovel too?
Listen - this hammer swinger's talkin' to you!

2000 people hollered, Go, John Henry!
Then somebody hollered, The mountain's caving in!
John Henry told the captain, Tell the kind folks don't worry.
That ain't nothin' but my hammer suckin' wind! (It keeps me breathing.)
A steel driver's muscle I intend.

Captain, tell the people, move back further!
I'm at the finish line and there ain't no drill.
It's so far behind, but yet ain't got the brains to quit it!
When she blows up she'll scatter cross the hills! (Lord Lordy!)
When she blows up she'll scatter cross the hills!

Well John Henry had a little woman,
I believe the lady's name was Polly Ann. (Yeah that was his good woman.)
John Henry threw his hammer over his shoulder and went on home.
He laid down to rest his weary back, and early next mornin', he said,
Come here Polly Ann Come here Sugar
Ya know, I believe this is the first time I ever watched the sun come up
That I couldn't come up.
Take my hammer, Polly Ann, and go to that railroad.
Swing that hammer like you seen me do it.
And when you're swinging with the lead man,
They'll all know they'll all know you're John Henry's woman
But, but tell them ain't all you can do.
Tell 'em I can hoist a jack, and I can lay a track,
I can pick and shovel too! (Ain't no machine can!)
That's been proved to you!

There was a big crowd of mourners at the church house.
The section hands laid him in the sand.
Trains go by on the rails John Henry laid.
They slow down and take off their hats, the men do.
When they come to the place John Henry's layin', restin' his back,
Some of 'em say, 'Mornin', steel driver! You shor' was a hammer swinger!
Then they go on by, pickin' up a little speed. (Clickity clack, clickity cla
ck, clickity clack, clickity clack)
Yonder lies a steel drivin' man, oh lord!
Yonder lies a steel drivin' man.
Yonder lies a steel drivin' man, oh lord!
Yonder lies a steel drivin' man.
Yonder lies a steel drivin' man, oh lord!
Yonder lies a steel drivin' man.